Relations with warriors and their meaning as depicted in sources related to Shimai Sōshitsu (1539-1615)
—島井宗室（1539-1615）に関する史料に見える武士との関係とその意味—

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【要旨】
島井宗室という人は、16世紀の博多の代表的な豪商の一人である。家の歴史にも関与したり、館内の武士に協力をしたりした。島井家の文書を見ると、日本の政治界から離れた博多においても持ち続けた豪商の抱負も見える。それを表現するのは、史料における武士のイメージだと思う。

島井家の文書は多様である。書状だけではなく、『島井家の由緒記』、『島井家系図』、『島井氏年録』などの様々なタイプの史料が残っている。全ての史料に見える共通点は武士との関係である。

すべての史料を二つのグループに分けておいた。グループ1は‘史実を描く史料’と称した。それは、書状と『島井家の由緒記』に当たり、つまり御用関係、行政と礼儀に関する資料である。その武士との関係のイメージは史実に近い。グループ2、いわゆる‘抱負を描く史料’には、『島井家系図』と『島井氏年録』を含めた。それはもっと広い範囲で普及する史料だった。それは、グループ1に対照的に武士との関係を描く史料で、島井家の社会地位を築くテキストだった。それを見ると、16世紀の豪商の社会的地位を築いたのは、貿易や営業より、有力な武士との関係だった。

0. The aim of the paper

The aim of this paper is to analyze the historical sources related to Shimai Sōshitsu (1539-1615), a wealthy merchant from Hakata, with regard to his relations with warriors. The analysis will be conducted mainly with the focus on the types of narration and the choice of the material used in the sources. With it I will show the methods of creating various types of texts by 16/17th c. merchant families in Japan.

I will argue that for merchants the depiction of their relations with warriors, and especially with the three famous unifiers of Japan, i.e. Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, was the most socially comprehensible way of expressing the family’s high social position. Furthermore, the way the warriors are represented in narrative sources is directly related to the audience the sources were addressed to.

1. The Shimai family from Hakata

Shimai Sōshitsu was one of the leading merchants of Hakata in the second half of the 16th c. The city itself, one of the most prominent merchant centers of Japan at that time, was a home to several rooted families.

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engaged in international trade. One of them was the Shimai family whose members sought their origins in the ancient aristocratic house of Fujiwara. The name Shimai was not as ancient though. Originally the family’s name was ‘Fuji’ and only Sōshitsu’s father changed it to ‘Shimai’.

The Shimai family specialized in both sake production and money lending. Later the family came into possession of at least one ship and engaged in international trade, especially with Korea. This helped them in building relations with both, local warriors, as well as Hideyoshi, when he started to plan his invasion of the continent. Even though Sōshitsu was against the invasion, he later much profited by providing supplies to the invading forces.

Sōshitsu also achieved a respectable position as a tea master. He was in possession of Narashiba katatsuki, one of the three most famous tea containers of such type in Japan.

2. Sources related to Shimai Sōshitsu

There are four historical sources that will be used in this analysis.

(a) Letters, 1565-1615
The first one is the set of letters received by Sōshitsu between 1565 and 1615. The set is a typical example of late sengoku correspondence. Letters are laconic and their context is usually scarce. Nevertheless, they give an important insight into the real merchant-warrior relations since most of them have been written by warriors. The topics mentioned in the letters include orders of trade (goyō), local administration and social rituals of reciprocated gift-giving and doing small favors. A few goshuin letters from Hideyoshi are also found in the set.

(b) The Testament of Shimai Sōshitsu, 1610
『島井宗室遺訓』
It is a set of rules that Sōshitsu left to his adopted son Kamiya Tokuzaimon. It is one of the earliest examples of merchant house codes in Japan. The rules include numerous advice on everyday activities, being in fact a guide to life. Sōshitsu underlines the necessity for diligence, self-reliance and frugality as defining features of a successful merchant. Relations with warriors are similar to their image which emerges from the correspondence.

(c) The Records of the Shimai Family, 1565-1598
『島井氏年錄』
The Records of the Shimai Family is a compiled set of notes on the most important events during each year. They cover more than 30 years of Sōshitsu’s life. The number of entries vary from year to year and there are blank years as well. The text is not only an important source of information about Sōshitsu’s life but also opens the field for more narrative-based analysis compared to the two above-mentioned sources. Quite surprisingly, even though the text describes the life of a merchant, it barely mentions any of his commercial activities or successes. It rather focuses on the merchant-warrior relations which I will describe in more detail later.

(d) The Genealogy of House Shimai, 1606
『島井家系図』
It is a typical keizu-type, i.e. genealogy text from early Edo period. It describes several generations of leaders of the Shimai, underlining the achievements of Sōshitsu, who was the most outstanding member of the family at the verge of the 16th c. The text is full of descriptions of the merchant-warrior relations.
All the sources above have been published as the Documents and records of the Shimai (Shimai monjo oyobi kiroku) in 1987 in Fukuoka by the Nishi Nihon Bunka Kyōkai in the 2nd part of the 6th volume of the edited set of sources entitled History of the Fukuoka Prefecture (Fukuoka kenshi).

For the purpose of this analysis I divided the four above sources into two main groups, the distinctive feature being their intended audience. The first group, consisting of (a) Letters and (b) the Testament may be described as sources related to, and closer to everyday life of Sōshitsu. They were not directly intended to circulate among the merchants. For the purpose of this analysis they may be referred to as `sources on historical reality`, even though caution regarding their connection to real events has to be taken under consideration as usual.

The second group of sources, namely (c) the Records of the Shimai Family and (d) the Genealogy of House Shimai to the large extent consist of notes taken from other sources such as letters. They were both created more in consideration of broader audience who might read them. Therefore both the method of compilation (the choice of information) as well as the narration style itself are focused on presenting the Shimai family in the best possible way. I argue that the way the Shimai family and especially Sōshitsu are described in those two sources is a proof of his and the whole family`s aspirations towards reaching higher social status. Therefore I called this second group ‘sources on aspirations’.

3. The warriors described in the sources

Now let us take a closer look at the above-mentioned two groups of sources and the relations with warriors as they are described in them.

‘Sources on historical reality’ - (a) & (b)

It seems that the ‘sources on historical reality’ (i.e. the Letters and the Testament) present the real merchant-warrior relations. They are mainly focused on the privileged trade orders (goyō). This type of relations may be defined as providing the local sengoku daimyō with strategic or luxurious goods by an influential local merchant. It was a common practice that both sides profited from. The warriors obtained specific goods which were usually harder to find and the merchants were sufficiently paid or exempted from certain taxes by the local lord. We find clear evidence in Sōshitsu`s correspondence that this type of relation was the main thread that tied both sides on the local level. For example, in 1574 Ōtomo Sōrin wrote a letter to Sōshitsu requesting him to summon a ball of bezoar.

Example 1

I asked you yesterday for some silk. You summoned it quickly and sent it to me which made me happy. Concerning the ball of bezoar, I lack it lately. I would like you to see to it quickly and I will not accept any failure [...] ¹

Sōshitsu

I asked you yesterday for some silk. You summoned it quickly and sent it to me which made me happy. Concerning the ball of bezoar, I lack it lately. I would like you to see to it quickly and I will not accept any failure [...] ¹

Sōshitsu

Sōrin (signature)

The above letter both expresses gratitude after the first request has been fulfilled (the silk being sent to Sōrin)
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and is a typical letter of request (ball of bezoar being requested by Sōrin).

The correspondence also shows reciprocal practices of courtesy which formed the frame for social contacts. These rituals of good manners included exchange of small gifts, especially victuals. Such practices were recorded in the letters from not only local lords but also from Hideyoshi. They form a major part of the merchant-warrior correspondence. In 1575 Sōshitsu received one of several letters of this type from Sōrin:

Example 2

I am sending this message to inform you that five codfish have arrived. You make me happy by your continuous kindness. [...] ²

Sōshitsu  Sōrin (red seal)

Also the Testament shows the real image of the Shimai family’s relations with local warriors. The text is full of various advice given by Sōshitsu to his adopted son and some of these advice concern the problem of how to coexist with local warriors. However, the fact that the relations with warriors are barely mentioned within a long list of problems, is also interesting. It seems as if those relations were not of the most importance to Sōshitsu. In one of the most explicit, yet laconic comments, Sōshitsu advises Tokuzaemon:

Example 3

If there comes an order [to lend money] from the lord of Hirado, take advice with Dōyu and Sōi and fulfill the order, but do not lend to any other lord.

Sōshitsu tells his heir that the lord of Hirado should be provided with credit if he desires. However, Tokuzaemon should first take advice from more experienced friends of the family – merchants Dōyu and Sōi. Furthermore, the money is such a vital asset to the family, that other lords should not be provided with any credit.

Sōshitsu also shortly advises Tokuzaemon to pay visits to other certain lords and this is the second and the last information about proper handling of the relations with warriors. The scarcity of this type of information compared to other plentiful pieces of advice in this long document is striking.

Both the Letters and the Testament clearly show the real relations between warriors and merchants based on fulfilling privileged orders and making small favors. Both sources had their respective recipients, i.e. the addressees in case of correspondence (mainly Sōshitsu) and Tokuzaimon in case of the Testament. They were not meant to circulate, therefore the image of the warriors is close to the real one.

'Sources on aspirations' - (c) & (d)

Now let us compare the image from the Letters and the Testament to the second group of sources which I named 'sources on aspirations'. Both sources in this group, i.e. (c) the Records of the Shimai Family and (d) the Genealogy of House Shimai have different structure than the Letters and the Testament. They
are both results of compiling material from primary sources such as letters themselves. The original material they include is relatively scarce in the case of the Records and in the case of the Genealogy it is only sporadic.

The most important aspect of both sources is that they were most likely meant to circulate (especially the Genealogy). In contrast to more personal Letters and the Testament they were probably created to spread the image of the Shimai family among other merchants, warriors and the clergy, since members of these groups maintained contacts with the Shimai.

The characteristic feature of ’sources on aspirations’ is that in order to create a positive and respectable image of the Shimai family as influential merchants, they do not put any stress onto their success in trade but rather describe them as friends to powerful warriors. Therefore both the Records and the Genealogy describe in detail Sōshitsu’s relations with warriors, and notably with the unifiers such as Hideyoshi and Ieyasu. The difference with the ’sources on historical reality’ is remarkable. For example, in the Records, Sōshitsu’s visit to Arima hot springs, was an opportunity to note down an elaborate story about the fate of Nobunaga.

As we can see here, Sōshitsu tells an allegorical story about bad omens which foreshadowed Nobunaga’s death. This style of narration is very different from the laconic style of letters which formed the base for many entries in the Records. In fact such allegories are very rare and they always concern the unifiers.

Still, it is the Genealogy which is the most warrior-oriented text. Even though Sōshitsu is initially introduced as a chajin and a merchant, the main description of his whole life is almost completely defined by his relations with warriors. The authors selectively compiled information from correspondence and the Records using all the entries about the unifiers of Japan. As a result, even though the contacts with them were sporadic, meetings with Hideyoshi or Ieyasu were described in extreme detail. For example, when both unifiers stayed in Nagoya (in Kyūshū) Sōshitsu was summoned for a meeting.

Example 5
文禄二年正月廿八日名古屋　家康公より 御酒・御物・御茶漬・御葉子下

On the 28th day 1st month in the 2nd year of Bunroku
in Nagoya [Sōshitsu] was given sake, soup, ochazuke and cookies from lord Ieyasu.

This short example is one of many instances of trivial situations described in detail in Genealogy only because they involved honorable warriors. The Genealogy, which was the text intended the most to circulate, shows how the relations with warriors were used to show the social position of the house Shimai and Sōshitsu himself.

Conclusion

In this brief article I showed how various types of sources related to Shimai Sōshitsu describe his relations with warriors. The first two types of sources, i.e. the Letters and the Testament are closely connected to real historical relations, showing both groups’ cooperation in terms of privileged trade, administration and gift-exchange. However, sources such as the Records and the Genealogy, which were both created to circulate, describe those relations very differently. They underline the importance of Sōshitsu’s relations with warriors, especially with the unifiers of Japan. The style of narration and the choice of information are very different. Their role is to underline the familiarity of those relations.

The meaning of this difference in description seems clear. In contrast to the more reliable ‘sources on historical reality’, the changing attitude towards merchants at the beginning of the Edo period and their eventual decline in social hierarchy needed to be opposed by narration of influence, connections and power as we see in the ‘sources on aspirations’. If we take it under consideration, it will not be surprising that at the beginning of the 17th c. the main source of merchants’ social prestige was their relations with powerful warriors and not their economic position or financial wealth.

Note

2 Ibid., p. 6.
3 Ibid., p. 84.
4 Ibid., p. 90.
5 For example in the Diary of Sōtan written by Kamiya Sōtan (1553-1635), another merchant from Hakata, and Sōshitsu’s close friend, we find an allegory of this kind which describes Hideyoshi’s visit to Hakata, where Hideyoshi is compared to a falcon.
6 Ibid., p. 105.
7 It must be noted though that their actual position gradually grew strong over time.

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